

Labor puts CD (Community Development) back into CDEP

CDEP organizations across Northern Territory have welcomed Federal Labors initiative to reform and retain CDEP and provide an additional 300 Ranger positions.

Consultation with a broad cross section of Aboriginal communities and CDEP organizations across N.T. will ensure that a strengthened CDEP program will provide sustainable economic development, and pathways into unsubsidized employment whilst retaining community development that is the lifeblood of many remote communities.

Support for business development, coupled with flexible training that reflects community needs, also recognizes the fact that one size does not fit all and that local solutions to local issues need to be taken up in order to ensure maximum success of the scheme.

Whilst acknowledging that the CDEP scheme has been successful in some areas and not in others, it must be remembered that CDEP began initially in 1977 as cost effective Community Development and Employment Projects, providing positive socio-economic outcomes, and that reform will build on those successes and create jobs and real opportunities, unlike Work for the Dole. Investment in communities is crucial to a thriving CDEP program.

Recent reports that CDEP is 'sit down money' are incorrect. CDEP has never been known as 'sit down money' in the Northern Territory. Rather, historically income support/unemployment benefits from Centrelink have been known as 'sit down money'.

There is clear evidence to suggest that people will be worse off under Work for the Dole (income support). NATSISS data (2002) shows that people employed under the CDEP scheme in remote Australia work longer than the 16 hours paid for, earn approximately \$100 per week more than the unemployed on average, and are in a position whilst engaging in CDEP to pursue cultural priorities.

However, the abolition of CDEP under the current Government will result in a massive shift from Work (CDEP) to Welfare. Normalisation and mainstreaming of Indigenous Australians through replacement of CDEP with programs such as Work for the Dole, may well result in the opposite of 'opportunities' that have been flagged by the Federal Government, including exacerbating abuse of children. The long term initiative of reforming CDEP and providing additional jobs and training is a welcome move in the right direction. Continuous dialogue with Government, Aboriginal communities and their leaders, and CDEP organizations across the Northern Territory, can result in the meeting of Government expectations and outcomes, and community aspirations and goals for a better future in remote communities.

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